Opening Statement of Senator Wayne Allard Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies,

Committee on Appropriations

Mountain Pine Beetle Field Hearing

Eagle, Colorado

May 5, 2008

I am very pleased to welcome all the witnesses who have agreed to appear before the Senate Interior Appropriations subcommittee for this important field hearing today. We have a very distinguished group from the Forest Service, local government, and the private sector.

Joining us on our first panel, we have the Under Secretary for Natural Resources and the Environment, Mark Rey; the Regional Forester for Region II, Rick Cables; and Barbara Bentz, an entomologist from the Rocky Mountain Research station.

The second panel includes Glenn Casamassa, the Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest Supervisor; Clint Kyhl, who is the Incident Commander for the Bark Beetle Incident Command Team; and Cal Wettstein, who is on the natural resources staff and coordinates fire issues for the White River National Forest.

On our last panel, I'm very happy to see familiar faces from local government and industry here in Colorado. We will be hearing from Jim Ignatius, Teller County Commissioner. As many of you know, Teller County suffered severe losses in the Hayman fire, the biggest in Colorado history. Jim's been a leader in working on the County's community wildfire protection plan.

Also on Panel III, we have Nancy Fishering, the Vice President of the Colorado Timber Industry Association. In addition to her work with the Association, Nancy serves as a consultant for the last remaining timber mill in the state, in Montrose.

Finally, we have Eagle County Commissioner, Peter Runyon, who's county facility we're sitting in today. Thanks for the

hospitality Peter. It's a pleasure to be here. I should also mention that Peter is a local businessman as well as a county commissioner and has been working diligently on the bark beetle issue.

Again, thanks to all of you for participating today and I look forward to your testimony and asking you some questions later in the hearing.

I'd like to make a few opening remarks before we begin receiving testimony. We had an interesting hearing last month in Washington, D.C. on the Forest Service budget. I pointed out then that we are facing a forest health crisis in this country unlike any I've seen in my lifetime.

There are bark beetle outbreaks affecting millions upon millions of acres in the Southern United States, the Intermountain West and Alaska. A recent Forest Service report indicated that over the next 15 years, approximately 15 to 22 million acres of western forests will experience significant tree mortality from bark beetles. Yet, in the face of this crisis the Forest Service is proposing to reduce its Forest Health programs by nearly half for this next fiscal year. If I have anything to say about it, this subcommittee is going to restore those cuts to the Forest Service budget and hopefully add some

funding to address the crisis that we are facing here in Colorado and throughout the nation.

I hope this hearing today, at the epicenter of this forest health crisis, will shed some light not only on the epidemic here in our state but also increase the awareness of what various species of bark beetles are doing throughout our nation's forests. This is a national problem and the federal government needs to be involved in addressing this issue over the long term.

As a native of Colorado, and one who has hiked and fished in these magnificent forests all his life, it is absolutely heartbreaking to me that experts say within 5 years, **ALL** of Colorado's remaining lodge pole pine forests may very well be wiped out. **THAT'S MILLIONS OF ACRES OVER THE NEXT 5 YEARS**.

As difficult as it is to confront these facts, I know that it's impossible to treat all these acres or to create a defensive line around these remaining untouched areas to prevent the pine beetle from killing more trees. The fact is that the beetle kill is spreading and we can't stop it at a landscape scale. I hope today, however, that we can talk about some practical ways to 1) prioritize areas for treatment to protect lives, communities, and property from fire and

hazardous trees; 2) how we can develop markets in areas like biomass energy production, cellulosic ethanol, and traditional salvage harvesting to treat the tremendous volumes of dead and dying timber on the landscape; and 3) what we can do to restore these forests in a way that this kind of event does not happen again.

Let me cover a few housekeeping matters before we begin. We are not going to use a timer at this hearing but if you could try to keep your testimony to roughly 5-7 minutes that will allow time for more questions which I generally think is most helpful to us in gaining knowledge from your experience. The record will be kept open for one week following the hearing so feel free to submit your full testimony and other materials to my staff and they will make sure it appears with the transcript of this hearing.

Thank you. Undersecretary Rey, would you like to begin?